

Pioneer Press, November 17, 2005

Veterans and their families gathered Friday afternoon in the theater of Buffalo Grove High School to pay homage to those who served in the U.S. military.

The second annual Buffalo Grove Park District-sponsored Veterans Day ceremony featured a performance by the U.S. Navy Band from Great Lakes, a presentation by a former military intelligence officer and a tribute to Americans missing in action and prisoners of war.

The highlights of the ceremony included a presentation of awards and medals to Edmund Kujawa of Wilmette, who served with the 5th Infantry Division during World War II. U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk, R-10th, and his staff helped Kujawa receive the medals to which he had been entitled for the last 60 years. Kirk personally pinned the Purple Heart, with Kujawa's name engraved on the back, on the lapel of Kujawa's suit.

"I knew I was going to get the medals today, but I had no idea it was going to be this kind of ceremony," Kujawa, 83, said.

Kujawa received the Purple Heart for wounds he suffered defending Caumont, France, taking shrapnel in his chest. Just 12 days later, Kujawa returned to battle with the 5th Calvary Recon Troop, driving across northern France. "We relieved the Big Red One in the beginning of July (1944)," he said.

The division also covered the southern flank against the German offensive through the Ardennes forest in Luxembourg, better known as the Battle of the Bulge.

"Our mission was to drive down small country roads looking for pockets of Germans," Kujawa said.

Kujawa also was given the European Theater Operations, American Theater Operations, Victory in Europe, Army of Occupation, Good Conduct and Unit Meritorious Award medals at the ceremony. Kujawa said all those awards were listed on his discharge papers, but he never had much desire to claim them until recently.

"I'm proud of them," he said of the medals. "I'm glad I was able to help this country out and help all the people back home. I was proud to be an American over there."

Rolling Meadows resident Karl Abt, the keynote speaker and author of a book about his experiences as a military intelligence officer interrogating German prisoners during World War II, shared his story about the Battle of the Bulge and answered questions from the crowd.

The ceremony concluded with the Champion Eagles Color Guard of American Legion Post 208 of Arlington Heights presenting the flags used by the six branches of the military -- the Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force, Coast Guard and the Merchant Marine.

Robert Ferraro, the post's past commander, then introduced the black flag with the silhouette of a prisoner, a guard tower in the background and the words "you are not forgotten" on it, which represents prisoners of war and service members missing in action. Ferraro read the numbers of POWs and MIAs in each war and then by each branch of the service.

"They are missing in places their families never heard of," Ferraro said.

The flags and the recitation of the number of MIAs and POWs were described by several members of the audience as the most significant parts of the ceremony.

"I have seen the MIA flag before," said June Wolf of Prospect Heights. "But hearing how many are missing in each branch of service, it's an eye-opener."

"It made it very evident what we should be honoring today," said Eugene Patrizi, a Schaumburg

resident who served in the Army Medical Corps.

Patrizi said all Americans should attend a ceremony honoring the country's veterans "to be aware of and realize the sacrifices these men and women have given us ... to keep us free and keep us safe. They gave their most precious thing -- their lives -- for their country."

Twelve-year-old Alanna Zawlocki and her sister Mary, 11, of Buffalo Grove, said they recognized the military songs played during the flag presentation because they learned them in chorus.

Their mother, Killeen Zawlocki, said she wanted her husband and children to attend the ceremony "to thank the veterans and to teach my children to thank the veterans. I told them we can spend two hours at a football game every weekend in the fall and we can spend two hours once a year to honor the veterans, which is much more important."